

# Paying for Metro . . .

The vote in the House last month to approve spending \$1.5 billion over 10 years to support mass transit in the Washington region is one that adds much-needed momentum to an important goal. It may yet prove that federal, state and local lawmakers can envision the future and take action to avoid a crisis — if Maryland and Virginia approve the matching funds that the House measure requires.

With its vote, the House joined the District of Columbia in taking a bold step and encouraging others to follow its lead. Last spring the District set aside one-half cent of its sales tax rate, anticipating the federal action that came in July. Now the Maryland and Virginia legislatures should take action on this transportation issue. To do so, they will need to put aside state politics and focus on what the most economically vital areas of their states will need over the next decade.

Some Maryland officials have argued that the state already has dedicated funding for transportation in the state — an assertion that was questioned by a Government Accountability Office study calling for stronger legislation to match the federal offer. The General Assembly adjourned after agreeing only to study the issue of providing funds specifically for Metro, and not even considering the need to increase transit funding more broadly.

Virginia's lawmakers, while still in session, are stuck in neutral as they debate how to enact a statewide transportation funding plan. Less-developed Virginia communities are de-

manding equal treatment with wealthier, more congested Northern Virginia. The General Assembly will meet again in the fall to face the issue.

Meanwhile, Metro is the only major transit system in the nation that lacks a significant dedicated source of funding and, as a result, faces deficits of hundreds of millions of dollars over the next several years.

The region's demographic clock is ticking: Between 2005 and 2030 the area is projected to add 1.2 million new jobs and 1.6 million more people, forcing it to absorb three times the population of the District. A strong and reliable Metro system is critical for managing this growth.

The time has come for Maryland, Virginia and the U.S. Senate to join the House and the District as regional partners on this very important issue. We need action in Annapolis and Richmond, and we need it now.

— Michael Knapp  
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